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Party Populism and Media Access: The News Value of Populist Communication and How It Is Handled by the Mass Media

FRANZISCA SCHMIDT[1]
University of Bern, Switzerland

The continuing successes of populist parties across Europe direct us to comprehensively examine the circumstances contributing to their growth. In this context, the question is often asked whether and to what extent the mass media provide a stage for populist messages and actors. The aim of this article is to discuss the relationship between party populism and media access and to analyze whether the use of populist communication is a successful strategy for disproportionate media attention. Through an input-output analysis, the article provides information about the specific proportions of populist party input that made it into news coverage. A quantitative content analysis of press releases and political news coverage in four EU countries shows that only in certain countries do political actors receive overproportionate visibility because of their populist communication. Moreover, all newspapers have a corrective effect on the dissemination of populist party statements. Thus, despite the news value inherent in populist communication, the mass media do not play an unreservedly conducive role in the promotion of populism.

Keywords: populism, party communication, news value, news reporting

In recent years, populist movements have experienced a rapid rise, especially in Europe. Because populists not only question the model of liberal democracy, but also have considerable potential for political polarization (Priester, 2012), it is all the more important to comprehensively examine the circumstances that contribute to their growth. There is now a broad consensus in the academic community that populism research should focus not only on political actors, but also on communication-oriented approaches, particularly regarding the mass media (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003; Mudde, 2004). As essential links between the political elites and the people, the mass media provide the public with information while influencing the conditions of party competition by providing or denying media access to political actors. Covering populist party communication in the news may entail concrete support for populist parties because this coverage provides them with a national stage from which they can spread populist

Franzisca Schmidt: franzisca.schmidt@ikmb.unibe.ch
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stances and be given party recognition and legitimacy (Ellinas, 2010; Mazzoleni, 2003). Against this backdrop, it is presumed that the media offer a particularly receptive environment for covering populist actors and messages because of a close link between populism and news value (Mazzoleni, 2003).

Research on the mass media's actual role in the conveyance of populism and strengthening of populist actors is burgeoning, and recently, some valuable international comparative studies have been conducted in this field (e.g., Ernst, Esser, Blassnig, & Engesser, 2019; Wettstein et al., 2019). So far, however, even studies that deal comparatively with the appearance of populism or populist parties in the media provide little information about the specific proportions of populist party communication that have made it into news coverage. If a study focuses only on populist actors' or messages' saliency in the media without including the preceding party communication in the analysis, it remains unclear whether and to what extent the media visibility of populist messages or parties is related to the media's expressed share of a party's populist communication. Hence, no conclusions can be drawn regarding how successful the parties have been in getting into the media through their populism (and whether their populist messages are overrepresented in the media compared with what they have been sending out). It is also not possible to adequately grasp which factors may have induced the media to depict this party populism.

To close this research gap, the current article centers on the following research questions:

RQ1: How is the use of populist party communication related to a party's access to the media?

RQ2: Is a party's use of populist communication a successful strategy for disproportionate media attention during election campaigns?

I explore these questions by conducting an extensive quantitative content analysis of party press releases and political news coverage in the print media in four European countries 12 weeks before the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections. The present article's contribution is twofold. First, it provides insights into the specific processing of populist input into news coverage and, in this context, discusses the news value of populist communication. The use of an *input-output analysis*—an approach that is largely lacking in previous studies—enables a direct comparison of the populist communication sent out by parties with the proportion of party populism ultimately depicted in the news. Second, on a descriptive level, the study design also allows for a cross-country comparative analysis of the mass media's actual handling of populist communication during the 2014 EP election campaign. The aim of the current article is to study populism at the intersection between the political and media systems and to shed light on the extent to which the news value of populist communication influences the journalistic processing of party communication. By directly juxtaposing parties' press releases with political news articles, it is possible to gain insights into the ways in which political and media actors interact and to examine the transfer of populist communication from one operational framework to another.

Defining Populist Communication

One of the most common definitions states populism is

> an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. (Mudde, 2004, p. 543)

In this logic, a monolithic people—which is inherently decent, ordinary, and of common sense (e.g., Taggart, 2000)—stands opposed to the elites, who do not feature these virtues and have deceived the people of their rightful sovereignty.

Populist ideology is usually reflected in the specific discursive patterns of (political) actors, making it empirically visible and measurable (de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018). Jagers and Walgrave (2007) were among the first to empirically quantify populist communication through classical content analysis, thereby influencing a number of subsequent studies (e.g., Aalberg et al., 2017; Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, & Exadaktylos, 2014). They perceive populism as a political communication style composed of particular rhetorical elements. The following definition is partly based on this conception and understands populist communication as a verbal statement consisting of an appeal to the people and criticism of the establishment. In this sense, populism is the property of a message, not the property of the communicating actor (Rooduijn, de Lange, & van der Brug, 2014). Accordingly, a political actor cannot be described as being populist or not; rather, one actor may be classified as being more or less populist than another based on how many populist messages he or she has delivered.

The first element—a people reference—lies at the heart of the concept and necessarily must occur as a precondition to qualify a verbal statement as being populist. As a guiding principle, populism appeals to and identifies with "the people" and justifies its actions in doing so. However, because displaying closeness to the people is part of the normal political discourse, an appeal to the people is—contrary to the original conception—not sufficient alone in defining a populist statement. To be in line with the definition of Mudde (2007), a people reference must always appear together with an elite critique.[2] Through the imperative conjunction of both rhetorical elements within a statement, it also becomes clear that sole "anti-elitism" without an appeal to the people is, likewise, not considered to be populist communication. Populism is thus

[2] While this definition takes adequate account of academic discourse's minimal consensus on a people–elite antagonism being inherent in populism (e.g., Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn et al., 2014; Taggart, 2000), the demand for the people's sovereignty is not explicitly included in this analysis. It can, however, be assumed that this implicitly resonates in exaggerating the people while simultaneously devaluing the ruling elites. Moreover, a separate operationalization of the concept is not conducted for reasons of feasibility within the framework of the content analysis: Explicit references to the sovereignty of the people are hardly found in press releases (the channel through which party communication is investigated), because political actors predominantly use them to discuss daily topics and specific contents rather than questioning the system as a whole.

first and foremost a relational concept in which the people have an antagonistic relationship to an imminent opponent (Priester, 2012).

Populism and the Media

When investigating how the mass media deal with populist communication, one must distinguish between populism emanating from political parties and entering the media (populism *through* the media) and populism *by* the media, which emanates from media professionals themselves (e.g., Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017). Whereas the first variant reflects party populism conveyed by the media, the second form can be described as genuine media populism. In accordance with the research question presented earlier, the current article investigates whether, why, and to what extent the populist input of parties reaches the media without addressing the second perspective in more detail.

The Mass Media's Handling of Party Populism

Acting as gatekeepers, journalists decide whether to cover incoming party communication in their political news section, thereby allocating more or less media attention to a party or its messages. For a political message, visibility in the media is a necessary prerequisite to influencing public discourse and being further disseminated into the public (Koopmans & Muis, 2009). Populist messages in particular are said to be highly persuasive and decisively influence a party's public perception (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2013; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2016). Accordingly, the more populism makes it into the news, the more clearly a populist party sharpens its profile, and the more effectively voters may be won over. However, political actors usually maintain a continuous dialog with the public, and not all content can be presented in a populist manner. Therefore, it is particularly advantageous for the respective parties if, in relation to the total messages sent out, it is first and foremost their populist messages that are conveyed by the media. If populist messages are hence *over*represented in reporting, the media essentially act as amplifiers of party populism.

Once the media report on the ideological arguments of populist communicators, the media also increase the public visibility and legitimacy of the parties (Esser et al., 2017). Moreover, frequent media presence on its own—even if the actual message is not (or only in a heavily modified form) transmitted to the media—may raise a party's recognition, signal political viability, and create the impression of significance in the political process (Ellinas, 2010).[3] This indirect reaction of the media to populist communication is especially advantageous for the parties if they receive more media attention than less populist or nonpopulist parties. Usually, the extent to which national political actors become visible and have a voice in the media is influenced by a party's political relevance. However, if parties become overproportionally visible in the news because of their populism, then the media take on a role as the populists' secret helpers.

[3] In this context, it seems to be rather unimportant whether the media report positively or negatively on the populist communicator. According to Mudde (2007), populists probably benefit from any kind of visibility because the potential voter segment they target tends to be more critical of the established media and hence is less influenced by their evaluations.

The News Value of Populist Communication

The news value theory is one of several approaches that explain how journalists proceed when deciding what to cover. Accordingly, news stories about events and topics can feature specific "news factors" that contribute to making these stories newsworthy (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Journalists base their selection on these news factors to which they assign a certain news value. A message with a high news value eventually has a higher chance of getting covered by the media.

As shown in Table 1, both elements of populist communication can be associated with specific news factors elaborated by Schulz (1976) and Staab (1990).[4] According to news value research, events that are familiar from one's own cultural perspective or from culturally close societies are more likely to be covered because they attract the audience's attention (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Thus, because a populist people reference directly appeals to the community that one identifies with (i.e., to a specific in-group), it carries the news factors cultural proximity and ethnocentrism, which express to what extent an event refers to its own in-group (Schulz, 1976).

Contents in connection with elites also attract the attention of the audience and are easier to get into the news because, first, they are seen as having more consequences for the recipients than others, and second, elite people often represent objects of identification for ordinary citizens (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Schulz, 1976). First and foremost, a populist elite critique thus carries the news factor personal influence because by definition, it always establishes an elite reference—that is, a reference to persons (or institutions) with power, influence, or prestige.

Furthermore, negative news has a higher chance of getting into the news: This type of news is unambiguous, satisfies a widespread psychological need for negative events, and develops more quickly than positive events, thus fitting better into the media's short publication cycle (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). A populist establishment critique contains several aspects of negativity: The verbal hostilities of populists as an expression of their disagreement with the ruling elites carry news factors such as conflict, which includes political events of an aggressive nature (Schulz, 1976), and controversy, which expresses the contrast between opposing viewpoints (Staab, 1990). Populists usually blame the establishment for working against the will of the people and for damaging the country and its citizens in doing so. Within their accusations, populists not only refer to actual damage, but also predict or expect potential damage (Staab, 1990) that is due to the elites' failures. Finally, an establishment critique sometimes comes with allegations of fraud or other criminal activities—for example, when populists accuse the elites of being illegitimately in power or corrupt. Accusations like this carry

[4] Sometimes, populist communication is understood not on a content level, but rather as a specific style of presentation, such as the use of provocations, vulgar language, dramatization, and simplification (e.g., Bos et al., 2013). These stylistic elements too correspond with what is considered newsworthy. However, although they may reflect the people–foe antagonism that is essential for populism, their use may also occur because some speakers simply seek to make their content more accessible or compelling (Wirth et al., 2016). Therefore, this definition is not selective enough because too many actually nonpopulist stances may be included in the analysis.

the news factor crime, which is also an aspect of negativity (Schulz, 1976). All the "negativity" news factors describe events that are perceived of as important because of their drama, emotionality, or excitement.

Table 1. News Factors in Populist Communication.

Element of populism	News factors	Dimension
People reference	Cultural proximity	Proximity
	Ethnocentrism	Identification
Elite critique	Personal influence	Status
	Conflict/controversy	Valence (Negativity)
	Potential/actual damage	
	Crime	

Note. See Schulz, 1976; Staab, 1990.

The main advantage of populist messages over neutral messages is that, in the aggregate, they always carry a certain number of news factors and thus a general newsworthiness, independent of their specific content. As journalists are guided by the news value of a story, populist messages have a better chance of being selected for coverage. I therefore expect that:

H1: Populist party messages are more frequently covered in the news than nonpopulist party communication.

Provided that populist communication has an advantage in the journalistic selection process, the respective populist message usually appears in a news article in conjunction with the emitting party. Consequently, parties that communicate in a populist manner also receive more media attention (i.e., visibility) because of their specific communication style. I therefore assume that:

H2: Political parties are more visible in the news if they use populist communication.

In a nutshell, H1 focuses on disproportionate news coverage of populist statements made by political parties in their press releases (without any ex-ante classification of populist actors), whereas H2 focuses on the disproportionate visibility of parties in the news, contingent on their use of populism in press releases.

Data and Method

Sample

To test these assumptions, party communication and political news coverage are analyzed in four European countries: Germany, Austria, France, and Greece. Regarding the independent variable, this case selection ensures that party populism is present in all countries in the form of strong populist parties. Because the hypotheses postulate cross-national mechanisms whose generalizability increases when confirmed in different contexts, case selection follows the logic of a "most different systems" design. Thus, there is variability regarding the populist parties' effective positions of power and the prevailing media system in the selected countries: In Austria and Greece, populist parties have been part of the government in the past few years,

whereas they have been kept out of the government in France and Germany by the mainstream parties, which have categorically rejected coalitions with these respective actors. Furthermore, Germany and Austria are countries with democratic-corporatist media systems, whereas France and Greece have polarized-pluralistic media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Party communication and media coverage were sampled over a period of 12 weeks before the 2014 EP elections. The European election period is particularly suitable for the current study because EP campaigns provide a setting that takes place simultaneously in several European countries, thereby ensuring cross-country comparability. To analyze party communication, press releases were collected from all political parties that received a vote share of more than 3% in the previous national or European elections (2009) and that published at least five press releases during the study period. To limit the data material, only press releases referring to content relevant to the European election campaign at least twice (i.e., to the terms EU or Europ*/europ* and/or acronyms of EU actors, institutions, or policies) were analyzed. These selection criteria provided a full survey (N = 1,931) of press releases on EU issues from a total of 27 political parties (see Table A1 in the Appendix).

To analyze media coverage, two quality newspapers per country were collected: one left-leaning and one right-leaning. Because the presented definition of populist communication is rather restrictive, a focus on print media is the most promising approach to analyze party populism; it increases the chance of finding populist statements, given that political coverage in print media is considerably more extensive than TV or radio reporting because of lower production costs and space restrictions (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006). Regarding the relationship between populism and the media, however, the tabloid press is said to be closer to populism than quality media (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2003). Because of its strong orientation toward a mass audience, tabloids are more strongly guided by commercial aspects and focus heavily on news factors such as conflict, crime, or damage (Mazzoleni, 2003). Beyond this, the tabloid press is also said to exhibit a general anti-elite bias (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, because there are now a number of empirical findings against this widespread thesis (e.g., Akkerman, 2011; Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2010; Rooduijn, 2014) and because the political discourse surrounding the European elections mainly takes place in the quality press (Brüggemann, Hepp, Kleinen-von Königslöw, & Wessler, 2009), tabloid newspapers are not included in this analysis. Still, it can be argued that quality media are primarily read by a small group of well-educated and politically interested elites. Yet the way in which the national quality press prepares its political coverage has a considerable impact on the broader political discourse because this form of media is usually perceived of as newspapers of record that serve as a reference for other media (Weischenberg, Malik, & Scholl, 2006). Last, unedited online media content—for example, social media or blog posts—is not suitable for this analysis because the central focus of the current study is the journalists' processing of populist party communication (i.e., their gatekeeping behavior and orientation toward news values). All newspapers were collected by subscribing to their corresponding e-papers, which were downloaded on a daily basis. This made it possible to electronically search the articles; like the press releases, only news articles containing at least two EU-relevant terms were included in the analysis. To limit the coding material, each country's left- and right-leaning newspapers were rotated on a daily basis. Only political news articles from the front page and political section were coded. Thus, a total of N = 1,349 articles were used in the quantitative content analysis (see Table A2 in the Appendix).

Content Analysis

The selected press releases and news articles represent the present study's units of analysis; here, first, the active actors were identified. An actor was considered active if he or she appeared beyond mere mention—for example, in the form of (quoted or direct) statements—and put forward a political opinion therein. Only one active actor was coded per press release, namely the (representative of a respective) party or parliamentary group that published the release. In news coverage, up to three active actors per article were identified. In addition to national political actors, nonnational, supranational, or nonpolitical active actors could be identified. They were coded in a separate category, also including heads of state or political actors who spoke on behalf of the government rather than their party. This coding logic considered that different actors, especially government representatives, competed with national parties and party exponents for visibility in political coverage. To capture populist party messages, (only) the statements of national political actors were further coded at a content level. In the case of press releases, the entire release was considered an actor's statement; in news coverage, one actor's statement consisted of all propositions that could be assigned to the same actor within one article, whereby they did not have to be contiguous or in direct speech.

To measure populist communication through a content analysis, the variables people reference and elite critique were constructed, based on the operationalization by Jagers and Walgrave (2007).[5] First, it was determined whether an explicit appeal to the people was in an active actor's statement. To qualify, a statement had to meet two criteria. First, the people reference had to be explicit in that the speaker had to refer to the population or a specific population group using terms such as *nation*, *people*, *electorate*, *taxpayer*, and so forth. Second, through the statement, the active actor had to advocate for the in-group in question—for example, by explicitly taking sides for the community, supporting its concerns and demands, or speaking directly in its name, thereby representing the position of "the people" (also see Cranmer, 2011). Because an appeal to the people was a necessary condition for populist communication, only if a people reference was present was the actor statement further coded.

An elite critique included any statements that contained criticism of political elites, a specific political measure, a political line, or the (political) system as a whole, and/or accusations of state failure. In addition, criticism directed against economic or cultural elites, such as central banks, intellectuals, or the media, was taken into account. An elite critique was understood as a negative evaluation of the establishment, which could be expressed through the attribution of negative qualities (e.g., in the form of discreditation or accusations) or through an explicit denial of positive qualities (e.g., in the form of an explicit refusal of praise or approval).

The documents were coded by a total of 19 native-speaking coders. Coder training was conducted in English; thus, excellent language skills in both the coding language and English were required. Before the coders started the actual field work, they had to pass a reliability test and achieve acceptable values for all variables. Up to four researcher-coder reliability tests were carried out until all coders reached satisfactory reliability values. The coders processed between 10 and 16 articles each, all of which had at least 25 active actors (or 25 press releases with the corresponding number of active actors). The final reliability coefficients for all the formal variables ranged between a Krippendorff's α of 0.81 and 1.00; for the identification of active

[5] A selection of corresponding coding examples can be found in the Appendix (Table A3).

actors, an average value of 0.74 was achieved for the media and a value of 0.86 for the press releases. The final reliability values of the two content variables were satisfactory for all variables, and there were no systematic differences regarding the document type or the individual coding languages (see Table 2).

Table 2. Researcher-Coder Reliability (Krippendorff's α).

	People reference	Elite critique
Type		
Newspapers	0.70	0.65
Press releases	0.90	0.75
Language		
German	0.78	0.69
Greek	0.80	0.70
French	0.83	0.72

Note. N = 25 active actors.

Analytical Strategy

To assess the populist party input, a scale for party populism was made to measure the percentage of populism found in a party's total number of press releases published during the period under study. By using these percentages, it was possible to control for the fact that the absolute number of issued press releases varied considerably between countries and individual parties. To encompass the mass media's coverage of populist messages, the focus was on the national parties' actor statements. According to coding logic, a party may have placed up to three statements within one article. The percentage of a specific party's populist messages in the news related to that party's total number of messages coded in news coverage (see Table A4 in the Appendix). If a particular party's percentage of populist statements presented in the news corresponded to that party's percentage of populist press releases, I spoke of a proportional representation of populist party messages in the media.

A party was defined as visible in a news article if it was coded as an active actor at least once in the respective article. A party's visibility in the news was measured by the percentage of articles in which that party was visible in relation to the total number of news articles published by that newspaper (during the period under study). It was considered to be proportional if a party's visibility in the news corresponded to the political relevance of the party, for which I took the percentage of votes for a party in the most recent national elections as a proxy. In this way, it was possible to control for the fact that successful parties already received a lot of media attention.

Two approaches were made to verify the assumptions. I first analyzed newspaper- and party-specific frequency distributions of populist messages and parties visible in political news coverage while contrasting them with the populist party input. Thus, it was also possible to identify the national characteristics of the media's handling of populist party communication and deal with the question of overrepresentation. To statistically test the hypotheses, a linear OLS regressions test was used to analyze to what extent the proportion of a party's messages (H1) or visibility (H2) in the news could be explained

by the proportion of populist communication in its press releases, thereby illustrating the overall effects of party populism on media access apart from country-specific appearances.

Results

The Coverage of Populist Party Messages

As shown in Figure 1, around a quarter (25.3%) of Austrian press releases contained one or more populist statements. This figure was slightly lower for German press releases, which only showed populist communication in 17.6% of the cases. In contrast, populist communication could be identified in more than half of the press releases published in France (50.3%) and Greece (54.4%). In the Greek *Efimerida*, 24.4% of all depicted party messages were populist, whereas this was slightly lower in *I Kathimerini* (17.5%) and in the coverage of the French *Le Figaro* (17.9%). *Le Monde* (10.8%), the *SZ* (8.9%), and *Der Standard* (6.2%) showed considerably fewer populist messages, whereas in the German *FAZ,* just 2.6%—and in the Austrian *Die Presse*, none—of the depicted party messages were populist. Thus, the percentage of populist messages in the news was highest in those countries where there was also relatively more populism in party communication, namely France and Greece.

To clarify the question of disproportionate media attention for party populism, the percentage of a party's populist press releases and that of its populist messages in the news were set in relation to each other. A proportional or even overproportionate representation of populist party statements was not found in any of the studied newspapers. Rather, populist claims were underrepresented in news coverage compared with what the parties sent out. However, regarding the journalistic selection process, there were differences between and within the countries. In Germany, for example, the ratio between populist press releases and populist messages shown in the *FAZ* was roughly 1:7, whereas a much more "permeable" ratio of 1:2 was found for *SZ* news coverage. In addition, not only was there a rather high proportion of populist statements reflected in the French *Le Figaro* and the Greek press, but these newspapers also seemed to filter party populism less strictly than, for example, the Austrian press or the German *FAZ*.

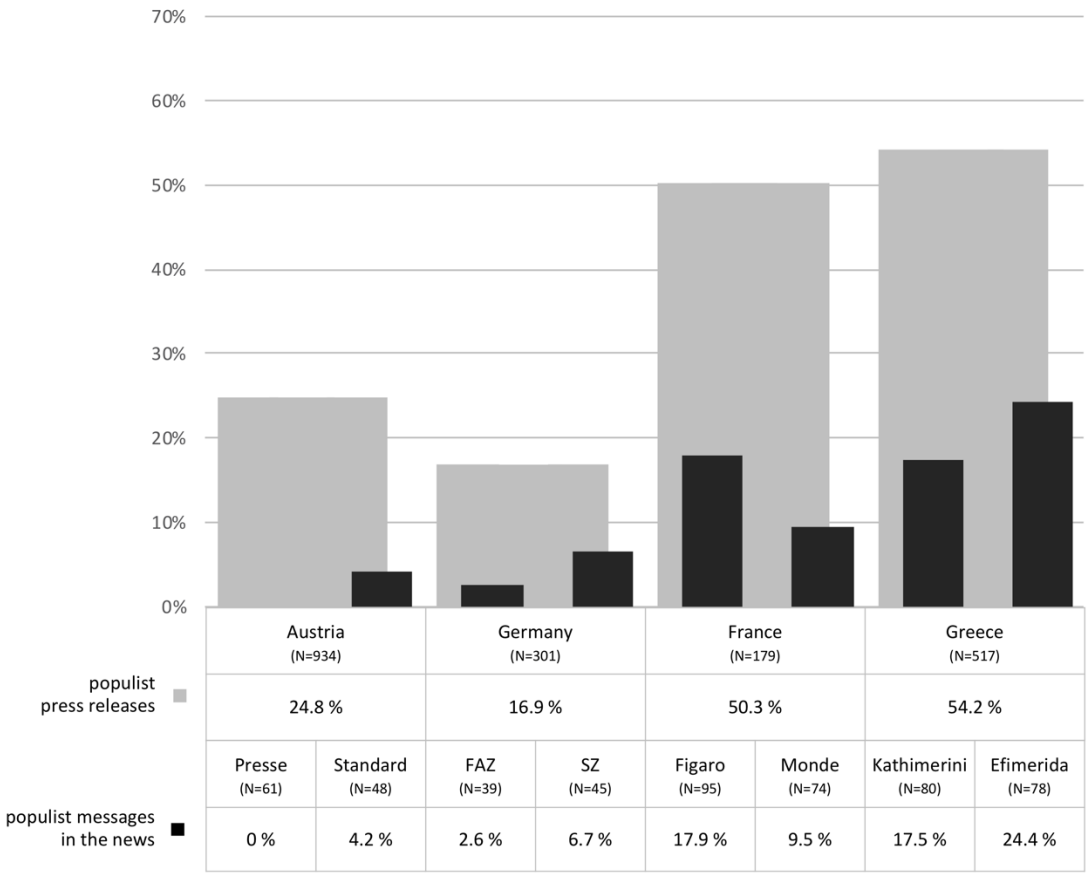


Figure 1. Populist party communication in press releases and news coverage.

To test whether populist party messages were covered in the news more frequently than nonpopulist messages, the ratio of populist press releases to populist party statements in the news was analyzed using a scatterplot (Figure 2). If the ratio of populist to nonpopulist party messages was the same in a party's press releases and in news coverage, the corresponding data points would lie on a straight line with a slope of one (shown dashed in the graph). If, however, the share of populist messages was greater than that of populist press releases, the populist messages were more likely than nonpopulist messages to reach the news. Corresponding data points in the scatterplot then would lie above the line that indicated a 1:1 ratio of representation. However, this only applied to the data points of the German CDU/CSU and the Greek OP, which is why H1 could not be confirmed: All other parties were sending out more populism than what was shown in the news. A regression line of all the actually observed values (solid line) compared with the hypothetical one-to-one ratio shows a much flatter slope and is equivalent to the coefficient of a linear OLS regression; $F(1, 23) = 0.506$; $p < .001$. That this value is smaller than 1 also shows that populist messages were less often portrayed in reporting than nonpopulist party messages, meaning that the latter were filtered out of coverage

by the media. However, the positive and highly significant predictor also indicates that more populist party communication did lead to more populist party statements that were visible in news coverage.

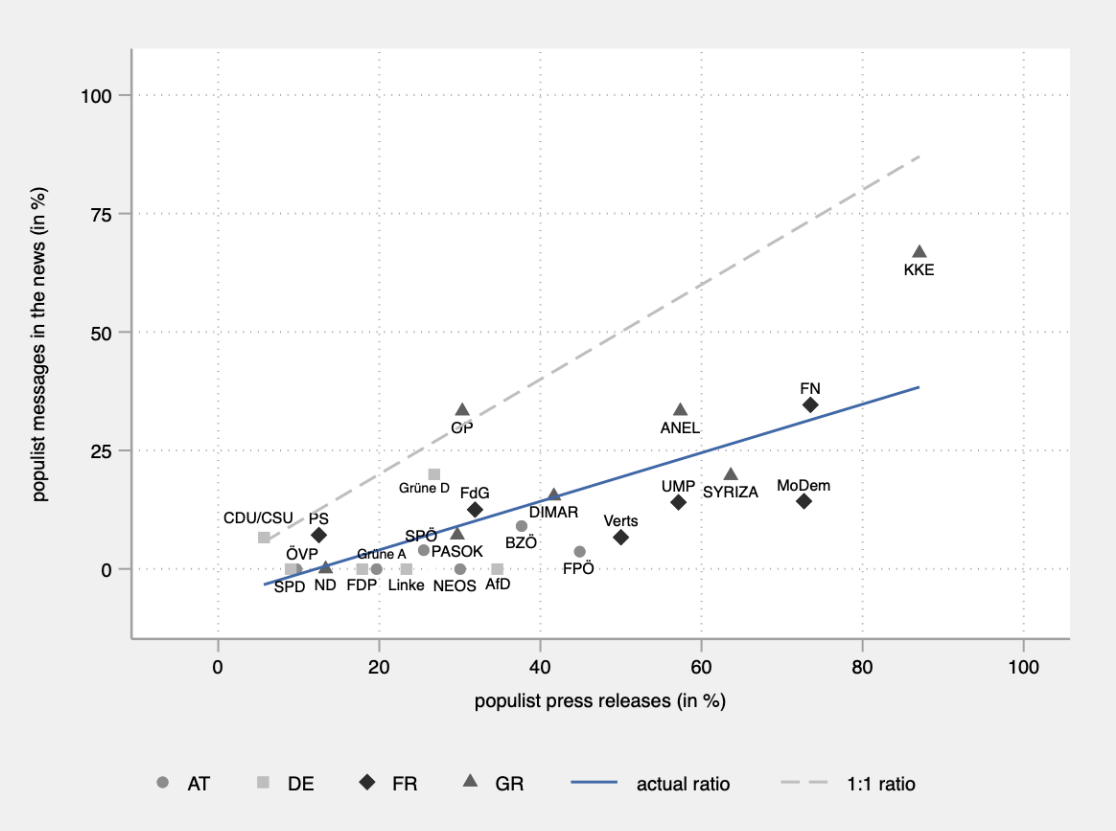


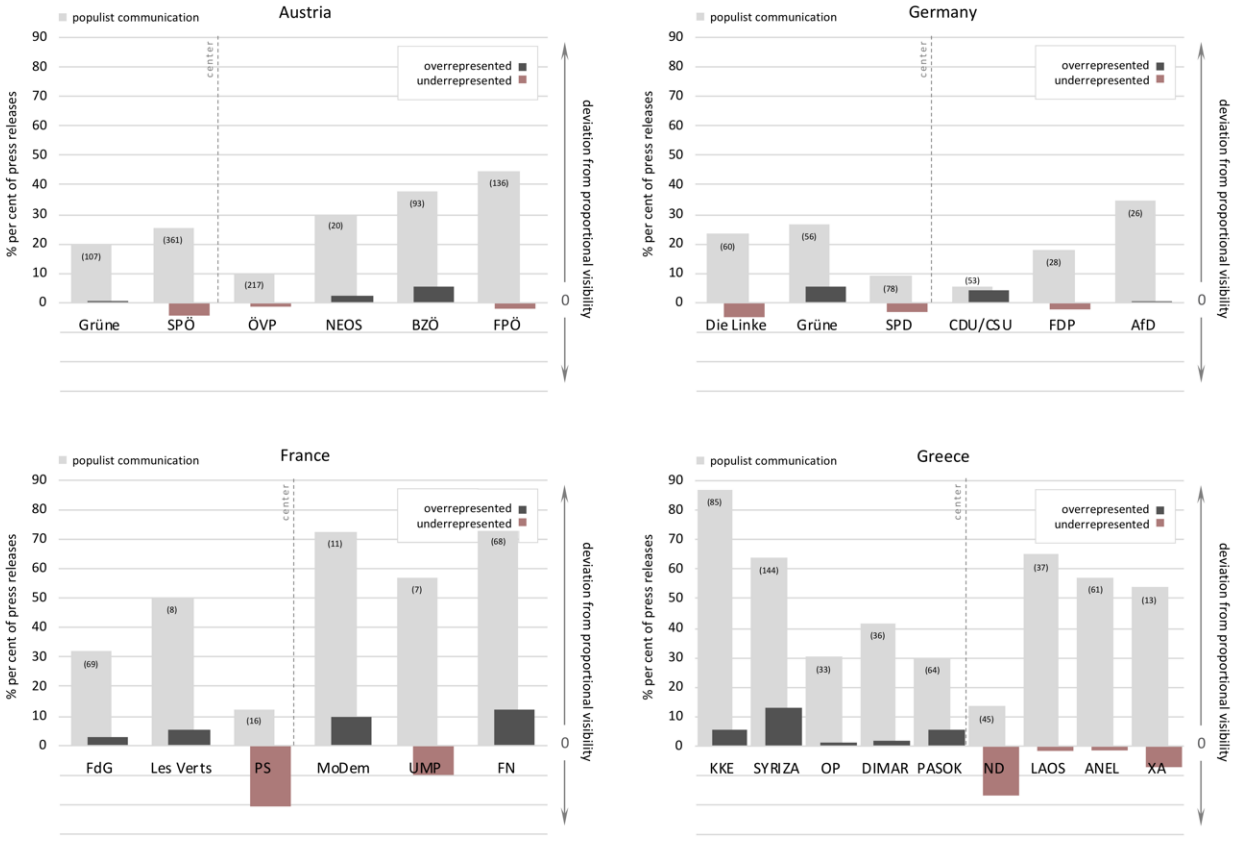
Figure 2. Scatterplot: Party populism and representation of populist messages in the news.

Media Visibility of Populist Parties

A party-specific frequency distribution allowed for further examination regarding whether populist parties were overrepresented in the news in relation to their electoral strength. To draw a conclusion about proportionality, it was relevant how media presence was distributed between a country's national parties, independent of other actors' presence in the news. Thus, the percentage values for media presence (actual visibility) were standardized (i.e., the sum of percentages for the relevant parties equaled 1, while the ratio of visibility between the parties remained the same). In the case of the vote shares, a certain share of national election results usually fell on other tiny parties. Because it was only relevant how electoral strength was distributed among the parties selected here (proportional visibility), those values were standardized so that they referred exclusively to the selected parties. Then, party-specific deviations from a proportional visibility were determined and compared with a party's respective share of populist communication.

Figure 3 shows that the visibility distribution in the Austrian and German news appears to have been relatively independent of party-specific populist communication. The right-wing parties FPÖ (Austria)

and AfD (Germany), who sent out the highest proportion of populist communication, did not receive more visibility than one would expect from their political relevance. On the other hand, the similarly populist right-wing party BZÖ in Austria and the somewhat less populist German Greens on the left were slightly overrepresented. The conservative CDU/CSU enjoyed overproportional visibility too, even though its press releases had the lowest percentage of populism of all the parties.



Notes: Parties are arranged from the left to the right according to their ideological position on the political spectrum (country-specific center ground is indicated). Rounded percentages for the populist communication of parties are based on the total number of published press releases of the specific party (indicated in brackets).

Figure 3. Percentage of populist party communication and deviation from proportional visibility in the news.

All in all, both the extent of populist party communication and the deviation from a proportionally distributed party presence in the quality media were higher in France and Greece than in Austria and Germany. The two then-governing center parties, the French PS and the Greek ND, both released a significantly lower proportion of populist communication than the other parties and were strikingly

underrepresented in the news.[6] The right-wing conservative and strongly populist UMP in France was also clearly underrepresented, but apart from the two major catch-all parties, all other French parties were overrepresented in the news. However, in France, it was the center-right MoDem and the right-wing FN that received the most overproportional visibility, whereas in Greece, the parties to the left of the political center—especially the highly populist socialist electoral alliance SYRIZA—were more or less overrepresented. In contrast, regardless of their highly pronounced populism, the extreme-right "Golden Dawn" (XA) was clearly underrepresented, and the two right-wing LAOS and ANEL parties were portrayed proportionally to underproportionally in Greek news coverage.

An added variable plot illustrates the relationship between visibility and party populism, adjusted for the influence of a party's vote share—that is, its political relevance (see Figure 4). A regression analysis revealed a positive and significant effect of populist party communication on a party's visibility in the news, $F(2, 24) = 0.0681$; $p < .001$.[7] The more populist communication a party sends out, the more often it tends to appear in the news. This finding supports H2, according to which the media are more likely to report on political parties when they use populist communication.

[6] The reason behind this could lie in the coding logic; compared with Austrian and German articles, a rather large number of the governing parties' statements in French and Greek news articles were explicitly referred to as government statements, so they did not fall into the general analysis of the national political actors' messages.

[7] The robustness of the visibility model was checked by additionally calculating a model that controlled for government participation because this too was an indicator of political relevance. Furthermore, the analysis dealt with a small sample size, and single cases may have had a large influence on the regression estimates. Thus, two additional models were calculated (with/without government participation) that excluded all cases exceeding the conventional Cook's D threshold (4/n) to identify potential outliers. In essence, these additional results did not change from the original ones. All alternative models are provided in the Appendix (Table A5).

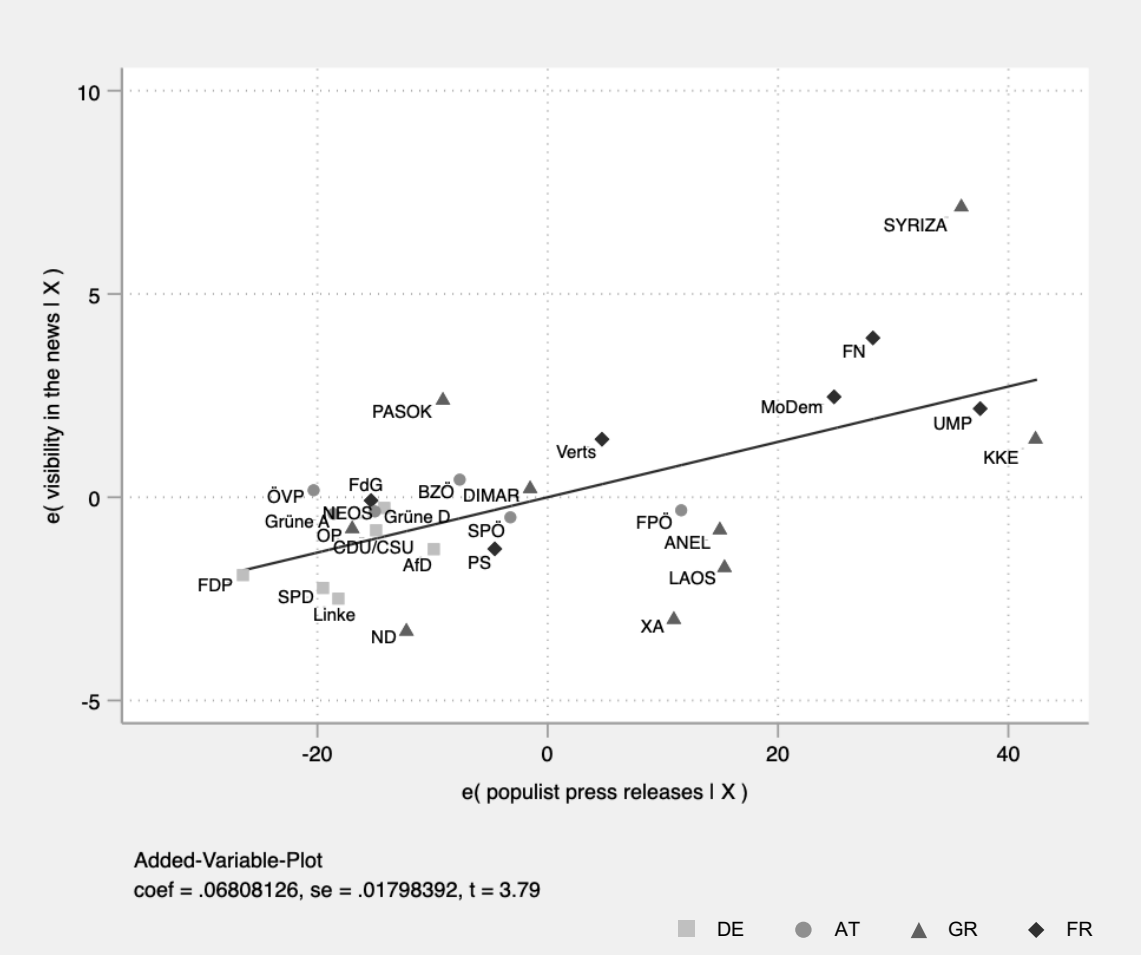


Figure 4. AV plot: Party populism and visibility in the news.

Discussion

The article sheds light on the specific news value inherent in populist communication and through an input-output analysis examined whether populist communication offers an intrinsic advantage over nonpopulist communication in the news selection process.

Before the findings are discussed in more detail, it is important to address the study's limitations. First, the operationalization of populist communication for quantitative content analysis has continuously evolved into more fined-grained measurements (e.g., Ernst, Engesser, Bu̇chel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017; Schmuck & Hameleers, 2019) since this study was conducted. However, with respect to the core content to be captured, the majority of more recent operationalizations did not significantly differ from Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) version, which in turn was distinguished by its simplicity and applicability. Nevertheless, the use of more detailed operationalizations may be an enrichment for subsequent studies. Furthermore,

the study's focus was on the quality press, and only two newspapers were analyzed per country. Hence, the findings' generalizability is limited because they do not necessarily apply to other media in a particular country. In addition, all findings relate to the context of the EP elections. If effects can already be found in connection with European issues, comparable results in the context of national debates are likely because these dominate the political and media agenda. Nevertheless, further research should clarify to what extent the results can be applied to the coverage of national or global political affairs. Moreover, the statistical models are based on a small sample size because the assumptions were examined at the level of individual parties. This problem was addressed by using regression diagnostic methods to check whether the models were robust after excluding influential cases. To support the findings, however, further studies should involve more parties and, accordingly, more research countries. An extension of the country sample could provide further information on the observed country differences. With regard to the latter point, it is also worth noting that the liberal media system was not represented in this study; the inclusion of Great Britain, with its highly commercialized press, for example, could further consolidate the generalizability of the confirmed H2 across different country contexts.

In general, the analysis shows that a party's use of populist communication is not necessarily a successful strategy for disproportionate media attention: Across all countries and newspapers, much less party populism was visible in the news than political actors originally sent out. Apart from just becoming populism amplifiers, the mass media may apparently play roles that are less or not at all in the interest of populist parties. It may not be particularly disadvantageous for parties if the media adopt a rather indifferent role as mirrors of party populism and proportionally reflect it in news coverage—although these parties can no longer hope for an amplifying media effect to reach voters. It can, however, be detrimental for parties if their populist messages are underproportionally or not at all conveyed by the news and if the media appear as (self-appointed) populism correctives—the role that, in fact, must be ascribed to all the media under study.

In any case, the question is how this finding fits into the theoretical framework. One possible explanation would be that journalists ignore the news value of populist communication and intentionally do not convey populist messages because they do not want to become populists' mouthpieces.

It is furthermore conceivable that the media intentionally omit people references while solely reflecting the elite critique—now without the populist antagonism—as part of the party statement. Being a forum for discourse, the media's correction of party populism into a mere establishment critique is both normal and desirable within the framework of a democratic system. However, whether anti-elitist elements were depicted in the article without their associated reference to the people cannot be determined retrospectively because of the specific coding logic and must be clarified in future studies.

Although there is no overproportional transmission into coverage, an increase in populist party communication undoubtedly increases the amount of populist party messages in the news. Hence, party populism is not completely filtered out of the news, and populist parties are well able to pass their message to voters via the mass media. A third explanation is that a populist statement is considered relevant in the selection process, but—because of, for example, specific journalistic working techniques or space restrictions—is not conveyed to the media in its entirety. Therefore, populist statements would no longer be

identified as such, and the effect of populist party messages in reporting would be underestimated in the results. Populist communication would then be transmitted to coverage in a "fragmented" form (see Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017). However, it is questionable whether one can still speak of populism in its proper sense, for it is precisely one of this study's strengths that the antagonistic character of populism is incorporated into its definition by being a necessary condition for identifying populist statements.

In any case, this initial finding should not fundamentally call into question the close connection between news value and political populism. The statistical analysis has shown that more populist statements significantly increase a party's media presence, indicating that populist press releases do attract attention in the process of journalistic selection; this is why the media—while not conveying the (entire) populist statement—are more likely to report on the responsible actors.

A general overrepresentation of political actors because of their populist communication cannot be confirmed with the available data. Instead, in this context too, media roles emerge that are not advantageous for populist parties: Populist actors may gain just as much visibility in news coverage as is legitimate in relation to their political relevance. The media then merely act as neutral rapporteurs because they do provide populist parties access to the media, but they distribute visibility independent of a party's populist communication. Beyond that, it is possible for some media to deliberately act as opposing rapporteurs and to grant populist parties little or no visibility in the news, even though their political relevance would legitimize more media presence.

The German and Austrian quality media are closest to the role of neutral rapporteurs, given the parties' overall small deviation from proportional visibility, which seems to be relatively unaffected by populist communication. Greek newspapers seem to face right-wing populist parties as neutral or even opposing rapporteurs (especially in the case of the XA), while overall, they predominantly tend to act as secret helpers of *left*-wing populist parties. Finally, the French press—although the UMP is an exception in this respect—can be considered the populists' secret helpers, with the political center and right-wing parties benefiting more from this role than the French left.

These results indicate that the journalists' handling of populist party communication may not be based solely on the professional orientation toward news value, but also on political preferences. Additional research should clarify which other factors—such as a newspaper's editorial line or the extent of political parallelism within different media systems—affect a party's access to the media when it uses populist communication. Future studies could furthermore provide information on the extent to which specific issues addressed in populist press releases find their way into political news. The question is, then, whether these issues are (potentially) more frequently covered in the news because of their very own news value, or because they were communicated through populist communication. Finally, there is need for clarification regarding the question of the extent to which the adopted media roles can be traced back to deliberate decisions of media professionals.

The media's corrective or opposing roles are desirable insofar as these roles do not provide a platform for populist parties and messages. From a normative perspective, after all, it may be the task of the mass media not only to criticize social grievances, but also to actively counter any possible dangers for

liberal democracy. By filtering out populist messages, the media may help to ensure that the political discourse is not permeated by an illiberal tenor. However, even if the press does not completely censor party populism, but merely decelerates its dissemination, it risks giving a larger target to the accusation of the "lying press"; this accusation has been emanating from the populists for quite some time. Media professionals who intentionally opt for a corrective function must be aware that their efforts may even give a boost to populist actors.

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Appendix

Table A1. Number of Coded Press Releases per Party.

	# Press Releases	% of PR Containing Populism		# Press Releases	% of PR Containing Populism
Austria	*934*	*24.8*	*France*	*179*	*50.3*
Grüne	107	19.6	FdG	69	31.9
SPÖ	361	24.7	Verts	8	50.0
ÖVP	217	9.7	PS	16	12.5
NEOS	20	30.0	MoDem	11	72.7
BZÖ	93	37.6	UMP	7	57.1
FPÖ	136	44.1	FN	68	73.5
Germany	*301*	*16.9*	*Greece*	*518*	*54.2*
Die Linke	60	23.3	KKE	85	87.1
Grüne	56	26.8	SYRIZA	144	63.6
SPD	78	9.0	OP	33	30.3
CDU/CSU	53	17.9	DIMAR	36	41.7
FDP	28	1.9	PASOK	64	29.7
AfD	26	34.6	ND	45	13.3
			LAOS	37	62.2
			ANEL	61	57.4
			XA	13	53.8
Total				*1931*	*33.8*

Note. Italicized elements indicate the total number of coded press releases and populist content for the respective countries or for all countries combined.

Table A2. Number of Coded Articles and Active Actors in News Coverage.

		# Active Actors	
	# News Articles	Nat. Parties	Total
Austria	*304*	*109*	*533*
Die Presse	165	61	302
Der Standard	139	48	231
Germany	*327*	*84*	*681*
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	144	39	298
Süddeutsche Zeitung	183	45	383
France	*327*	*169*	*764*
Le Figaro	161	95	365
Le Monde	166	74	399
Greece	*391*	*158*	*574*
I Kathimerini	196	80	299
Efimerida ton Syntakton	195	78	275
Total	*1349*	*520*	*2552*

Note. Italicized elements indicate the total number of coded news articles and active actors for the respective countries or for all countries combined.

Table A3. Coding Examples.

Variable	Example (Source)
People Reference	
Explicit mention of and advocacy for a specific population group	We simply cannot go on like this if we are to even begin the task of restoring living standards and community cohesion available to millions of hardworking British families (Nigel Farage of UKIP, 22 May 2014).
Explicit mention of a specific population group and allegedly expressing this group's attitude	Voters are sick and tired of the same old business-as-usual politics and they are voting Green because they know that a Green vote is a vote for real change for the common good. They are realizing we are the party offering the most just and sustainable future for the whole of Britain and the planet (Natalie Bennett of The Greens, 24 May 2014).
Elite Critique	
Criticism toward political elites in terms of accusation and negative evaluation of government performance	David Cameron has broken his solemn promise to the British people on one of the most important political issues. And he has done so because he refuses to take back control of our borders in respect of more than 400 million people from more than two dozen countries on continental Europe (Nigel Farage of UKIP, 22 May 2014).
Criticism toward political elites in terms of discreditation and accusation	After years of being ignored by the out-of-touch political elite, after years of watching our Green and Pleasant Land turned into a bankrupt, crime-ridden, Third World slum—it's time to hit back and tell the greedy, useless politicians exactly how you feel! (Press Release of the BNP, 22 May 2014).

Note. All examples are taken from UK press releases that were employed during the coder training.

Table A4. Number of Coded Messages in News Coverage per Active Actor.

	# Coded Messages	% of Messages Containing Populism		# Coded Messages	% of Messages Containing Populism.
Austria	*109*	*1.8*	*France*	*169*	*14.2*
Grüne	12	0.0	FdG	8	12.5
SPÖ	25	4.0	Verts	15	6.7
ÖVP	25	0.0	PS	42	7.1
NEOS	9	0.0	MoDem	14	14.3
BZÖ	11	9.1	UMP	64	12.5
FPÖ	27	0.0	FN	26	34.6
Germany	*84*	*4.8*	*Greece*	*158*	*20.9*
Die Linke	3	0.0	KKE	18	66.7
Grüne	10	20.0	SYRIZA	66	19.7
SPD	18	0.0	OP	3	33.3
CDU/CSU	45	4.4	DIMAR	13	15.4
FDP	2	0.0	PASOK	28	7.1
AfD	6	0.0	ND	21	0.0
			LAOS	0	n.a.
			ANEL	9	33.3
			XA	0	n.a.
Total				*520*	*12.1*

Note. Italicized elements indicate the total number of coded messages and populist content for the respective countries or for all countries combined.

Table A5. OLS-Regressions: Party Populism and a Party's Visibility in the Quality Press.

	Party Visibility			
	Model 1	*Model 2*[a]	*Model 3*[b]	*Model 4*[a, b]
PartPop	0.0681***	0.0686**	0.0482**	0.0490**
	(0.0180)	(0.0211)	(0.0162)	(0.0171)
vote share	0.288***	0.287***	0.256***	0.265***
	(0.0307)	(0.0388)	(0.0274)	(0.0358)
government		0.0612		−0.299
		(1.312)		(1.220)
_cons	−1.882	−1.902	−0.909	−1.105
	(1.006)	(1.110)	(0.889)	(0.889)
N	27	27	26	25
adj. R^2	0.768	0.758	0.782	0.805

Note. Non-standardized OLS coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. All regressions have high tolerance values (> 0.30) and low values for VIF (< 3.5), indicating that there are no severe multicollinearity effects present.
[a]OLS regression controlled for government participation. [b]OLS regression after identification of influential data points (Cook's D > 4/n: *Model 3* without SYRIZA; *Model 4* without SYRIZA & PASOK).
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .00$.